

## Frequently Asked Questions About Crow's Nest Natural Area Preserve

- **How much land was protected?**

1,770 acres was purchased in April 2008 (Phase I). If funds become available, Phase II will add an additional 1,102 acres by the end of 2009.

- **Why was Crow's Nest purchased by the state and county?**

Crow's Nest has long been a conservation priority for local citizens and the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Natural Heritage Program. It is a large and complex conservation project, that required the negotiation and financial partnership of Stafford County, DCR, The Nature Conservancy, N. VA Conservation Trust, Trust for Crow's Nest and others.

- **How much did it cost to purchase Crow's Nest?**

\$19.3 million for Phase I (\$10,900 per acre).

- **How can I get in to visit?**

Crow's Nest is currently closed to the public. Lack of funds and staff make it impossible for DCR to offer personal guided visits, and no public access facilities currently exist, there is also no place to park. DCR will plan to offer guided field trips advertised and open to the public every three months.

- **When will the gate be open so that people can come in to visit?**

Public access cannot be allowed until two professional Natural Heritage staff are hired, and they can oversee the construction of parking areas and trails are available to manage access, resource management and safety issues. The best case scenario for this is not until late in 2009.

- **How often will DCR provide guided field trips for people to see Crow's Nest?**

At present, DCR does not have any staff or funding to support work at Crow's Nest. We hope to offer guided field trips open to the public at least once every three months.

- **Can I paddle my canoe/kayak (or use my motorboat) to get to the preserve, then beach the boat and get out and walk around?**

No, officially the preserve is closed to public access.

- **Now that the land is in public ownership, there won't be anymore hunting, right?**

There will not be any more unmanaged hunting. DCR will conduct managed waterfowl hunts (by lottery) in order to comply with the Virginia Waterfowl Blind Laws. Doing so will ensure that the public waters surrounding Crow's Nest are hunted only once per week or less, which will balance hunting activities with the use of the preserve by the non-hunting public as well as migratory waterfowl. This approach means that the preserve will experience hunting no more than once per week, as opposed to six days per week if DCR did not exercise its riparian ownership right to license, erect, and hunt waterfowl blinds. Deer hunting on the preserve may be conducted under managed scenarios if it becomes clear that deer are causing negative impacts to native vegetation. No other hunting (turkey, squirrels, etc.) is envisioned as part of the management approach at Crow's Nest. The land on the western end of the peninsula NOT purchased by DCR will continue to be hunted by a local hunt club.

- **Can I go hunting at Crow's Nest?**

Waterfowl hunting opportunities will be made available using a lottery system beginning in fall 2008. Hunting will be restricted to no more than one day per week.

- **Is fishing going to be allowed?**

Fishing won't be prohibited, but there are not many good or easily accessible places to fish from the bank. The public waters surrounding the preserve are, of course, open to fishermen in boats. Eventually, some sort of pier or dock may be constructed to improve land-based fishing.

- **Can I go camping at Crow's Nest?**

Camping activities inevitably result in repeated localized intensive use and long-term degraded site effects. Even low-intensity camping styles cause some adverse impacts. Permitting camping would lead to gradual habitat degradation and negative impacts on rare species. For these reasons, camping is considered incompatible with the objectives of the Virginia Natural Area Preserve System and is prohibited.

- **Can I go swimming at Crow's Nest?**

Swimming is not allowed on DCR-owned natural area preserves, due primarily to the issue of public safety. With no lifeguards or patrols in place on public beaches or waterways, responsible landowning public agencies cannot officially sanction swimming.

- **What kinds of public uses are going to be permitted?**

The site has great potential for providing passive recreation and outdoor education opportunities. Staff and operations resources are needed, before public access can be effectively implemented. Management challenges exist for which there are not staff to address the needs such as ATV use and trespass, and invasive species. Plans are in the early stages to consider placement of multiple parking areas, a canoe/kayak launch site, and hiking trails and wildlife observation areas that feature interpretive information about the history of the natural and cultural history of the property. Until staff are onsite, the preserve will remain closed.

- **What is a state natural area preserve? Is that like a park?**

The Virginia Natural Area Preserve System was established by law in 1989 to protect and conserve *natural heritage resources* (habitats of rare plants and animals; exemplary natural communities; other rare natural features) throughout the state. This system of protected lands is administered by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation and managed by the Division of Natural Heritage. Natural Area Preserve Dedication, in accordance with the *Code of Virginia* offers strong levels of protection by placing privately and publicly held natural areas into a legally established statewide preserve system with statutory protection against most forms of condemnation and conversion to other land uses. Public access and recreation needs are secondary to resource protection.

- **Why aren't horses or mountain bikes going to be allowed to use the trails?**

Except for accessing established parking areas and public access points designed for automobiles, use of bicycles in natural area preserves is prohibited because of the adverse effects of trail use, erosion, and spread of invasive species. Horseback riding is inappropriate for natural area preserves due to the well documented negative impacts to soils and vegetation of concentrated and frequent passage of horses. Additionally, the introduction of invasive weeds from both manure and hoof-borne vectors is a documented negative aspect of horseback riding in areas managed for natural heritage resources.